

A NEW
Historical Relation
OF THE
KINGDOM
OF
SIAM.

BY

Monfieur DE LA LOUBERE,
Envoy Extraordinary from the FRENCH
KING, to the KING of SIAM, in
the years 1687 and 1688.

Wherein a full and curious Account is given of the Chi-
nefe Way of Arithmetick, and Mathematick Learning.

In Two T O M E S
Illustrated with SCULPTURES.

Done out of French, by A. P. Gen. R. S. S.

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T A B L E

O F T H E

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The Occasion and Design of this Work.

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Reading de La Loubère
The Chapter on
the Siamese Calendar

Laurent Hennequin



Among the French envoys to Siam in the 17th century, Simon de La Loubère (1643-1729) left one of the most complete accounts of the country at that time. Indeed, his book, *Du Royaume de Siam*¹ provides

We wish to thank Mr Todd Babcock for proof-reading a first version of this article.

¹Simon de La Loubère, *Du Royaume de Siam, par Monsieur de La Loubère, envoyé extraordinaire du Roi auprès du Roi de Siam*. Paris, Amsterdam. 1691.

Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h, *Etude historique et critique du livre de Simon de La*

information which is generally abundant, reliable and, an important fact, quite varied, compared with the other authors who also went to Siam at the same time, but who often merely related the diplomatic side of their visits. Moreover, the information he gives is usually quite reliable and bears no comparison with the fantastic descriptions of foreign lands which were not uncommon even at the end of the 17th century.

However, reading de La Loubère raises quite a few problems as his description was meant for French readers of the 17th century and it is now read by modern readers, mostly from a Siamese perspective. Thus, not only did de La Loubère record information concerning things which were mostly foreign to him but he also presented it specifically for readers who were by definition uninformed of what he was talking about. In addition, the approach he used was the one in practice at his time and in his country, and even if we cannot take for granted that it is identical to the approaches we are now familiar with, either from Europe or Asia, it is quite difficult to determine what was conditioned or even distorted by his own approach and what can be considered as an accurate description of reality. Last but not least, the very knowledge that he exported to Europe may simply be less a description of facts than a second-hand report, not necessarily faithful, of the knowledge which the Siamese had on their own country and culture. In other words, reading de La Loubère's writings nowadays requires that while we look for observations of things of the past, we should also take into account his approach, which differs from ours due to the distance in time and space.

Loubère "*Du Royaume de Siam*" — Paris 1691. Edition Recherches sur les civilisations, Paris. 1987.

To address, in part, these questions, we will examine the chapter on the Siamese calendar, entitled "The names of the days, of the months and of the years in Siamese". Let us first quote the chapter in full in its English translation² :

«The names of the days, of the months and of the years of the Siamese.

Van in Siamese signifies a day. The names of the days are,

Van Athit, the day of the Sun, or Sunday.

Van Tchan, the day of the Moon, or Monday³.

Van Angkaan, the day of Mars, or Tuesday.

Van Pout, the day of Mercury, or Wednesday.

Van Prahaat, the day of Jupiter, or Thursday.

Van Souc, the day of Venus, or Friday.

Van Sáou, the day of Saturn, or Saturday.

The names of the Planets are therefore *Athit*, *Tchan*, *Angkaan*,

²The translation quoted here is the one published in London in the 17th century (A *New Historical Relation of the Kingdom of Siam. Done out of French by A.P. Gen. SS.* London, 1693. Reprint by Oxford University Press, 1969. p. 168 sq.) This translation was found at faults in quite a few instances : the Siamese names are not exactly transcribed as they are in French, especially some of the accents are dropped ; a few things are not translated ; there are a couple of mistakes ; and the expression is sometimes ambiguous. For these reasons, we have made a corrected version of the translation. The question of reading a text in a translation will not be addressed in this paper, however the next note will show how one can be misled by a translation.

³The published translation just says literally : "*Van Athit*, Sunday, *Van Tchan*, Monday", taking for granted that an English reader would recognize the name of the planet behind the name of the day. Even though the French names of the days are as transparent, and maybe more, the names of the planets are systematically mentioned in the original French text. In this case, the translator does not say what the original text says but leaves his reader guessing.

&c. It is true they name not the Planets, when not speaking of the days, without giving them the title of *Prá*, which, as I have several times declared, denotes a very great excellency. Thus *Prá Athit* signifies the Sun, *Prá Tchan* the Moon, *Prá Prahaat* Jupiter : but the word *Prá* is written with a P. stronger than that which is in the first syllable of the word *Prahaat*. Besides, all these names are of the Bali⁴ tongue. The Sun is called *Tavan* in Siamese and the Moon *Doën*. Abraham Roger, in his history about *The customs of the Brahmins* has given us the names of the days in *Samskortam*, which, faith he, is the learned language of the Brahmins of Paliacate on the coast of Coromandel. They are also taken from the planets : *Suriawaram* Sunday, *Jendrawaram* Monday, *Angaracawaram* Tuesday, *Buttawaram* Wednesday, *Brahaspitawaram* Thursday, *Succrawaram* Friday, *Senniawaram* Saturday. It is evident that *waram* signifies day, that *Suria* is the name of the Sun, perhaps with some inflection to denote the genitive ; & that *Jendra* is the name of the Moon, perhaps also with some inflection, which being taken away, would leave some resemblance between this word and the Bali word *Tchan*. As to the other names, *Angaraca* is quite similar to *Angkaan* ; *Butta*, which must be pronounced *Boutta*, is no other than *Pout* ; *Prahat* agrees with the beginning of *Brahaspita* & *succra* & *souc* are the same word. *Senni* & *Sáou* appear more remote, & *Suria* & *Athit* have nothing common ; but what the same author adds is remarkable, that Sunday is called *Aditawaram* in the vulgar language of Paliacate, for it is there that we do again find the Bali word *Athit*.

The Chinese, according to Father Martini in his *Historia Sinica*, p. 31. do not name the days by the Planets, but by the sixty names that

⁴De La Loubère here transcribed the word "Pali" in its Siamese pronunciation.

they give to the sixty years of each cycle ; so that their week, so to explain myself, is a revolution of sixty days.

The Siamese call the months in their order :

Deüan, signifies a month.

Deüan áĩ, the first month.

Deüan Tgii, the second month.

Deüan Sam, the third month.

Deüan sii, the fourth month.

Deüan haa, the fifth month.

Deüan houk, the sixth month.

Deüan ket, the seventh month.

Deüan peet, the eighth month.

Deüan cáou, the ninth month.

Deüan sib, the tenth month.

Deüan sib-et, the eleventh month.

Deüan sib-song, the twelfth month.

The Siamese people understand not the words *áĩ* and *Tgii*, which are the names of the first two months, but it is probable that these two are two old numerical words, which signify *one* and *two* ; & this is evident from the word *Tgii* because the Siamese say *Tgii-sib* to signify *twenty*, which means literally two tens. All the other names of months are still in use to signify numbers, with this difference that, when they are put before the substantive, they signify pure numbers, & when they are placed after, they become names which denote order. Thus *sam Deüan* signifies three months, & *Deüan Sam*, the third month.

Pii signifies a year. The twelve names of the year are :

Pii ma mía, the year of the little mare.

Pii ma mê, the year of the great mare.

Pii Vok, the year of the ape.

Pii Rakaa, the year of the crow.

Pii Tchìò, the year of the sheep.

Pii Counne, the year of the pig.

Pii Choüat, the year of the rabbit.

Pii Tchlou, the year of the lizard.

Pii Kan, the year of the hens.

Pii Thô, the year of the goat.

Pii ma Rong, the year of the sea-gull.

Pii ma seng, the year of the great serpent.

Most of these names are also of the Bali tongue. Now, as the Siamese make use of the cycle of sixty years, they ought to have sixty names to name the sixty years of every cycle; & yet the persons whom I consulted, could give me no more than twelve which are repeated five times in every cycle, to arrive at the number of sixty ; but I doubt not that it is that which, with some additions, makes the difference ; & I think I have found the proof thereof in two dates of Siamese letters which I have carefully taken from the originals. The first is thus : *In the first month, the 9th day after the full Moon in the Æra 2229, the year Tchlou sapsoc*. And the second is thus : *The eighth month, & the first day of the Moon's decrease in the year Pii Thô sapsoc of the Æra 2231*. The word *Æra* in these two dates simply signifies year, as in the Spanish language ; so that it is all one to say the *Æra 2229*, & to say the year *Tchlou Sapsoc* ; to say the *Æra 2231*, & to say the year *Pii tho sapsoc*. Besides, as the word *Pii* signifies year, they might say *Thô Sapsoc* instead of *Pii Thô sapsoc* as they have put *Tchlou sapsoc*, &

not *Pii Tchlou sapsoc*. Now these two years, which are the years 1685 & 1687 of Jesus Christ, are not called simply either *Tchlou* or *Thô* that is to say of the *Lizard & Goat*, but to the words *Tchlou* and *Thô* is added the word *Sapsoc* which I understand not, & which was added to the name of the twelfth of the years, which was then running, to distinguish it from the four other twelfths of the years of the same cycle.»

Even though the text is rather short, a few significant features of 17th century Western science are recognizable, in particular the encyclopedic spirit. Europe at that time witnessed the flourishing of academies, which were more or less informal groups of scholars who met to promote and discuss matters of science, arts, religion, ethics, etc. What was original in France in the 17th century was that some of these academies were instituted and supported by the central State. 1635 saw the creation of the French Academy (*Académie Française*), dedicated to matters concerning French language ; 1648, the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture (*Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*) ; 1661, the Academy of Dance (*Académie de Danse*) ; 1663, the Academy of Inscriptions and Letters (*Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*) ; 1663, the Academy of Science (*Académie des Sciences*), etc. As a matter of fact, de La Loubère was elected a member of the *Académie Française* in 1693 and of the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* in 1694, mostly because of his works on Siam⁵. In the same year 1694, he contributed to the restoration of a provincial poetical academy, the *Académie des Jeux Floraux de Toulouse*⁶. Although he was not an academician at the time

⁵Jacq-Hergoualc'h, *op. cit.* 1987. p. 79 & 80.

⁶*Ibid*, p. 82.

he left for Siam, he was actively involved in the movement in his life time.

When sent on his mission to Ayuthaya, where he stayed from 1687 to 1688, de La Loubère had the title of "Extraordinary envoy of the King to the King of Siam", as appears in the full title of the original book in French. He was sent, that was his first task, to contribute to the conversion of the Siamese, and the King of Siam, to Christian religion. He was also instructed to establish a commercial treaty and to gain some military concessions, in particular for the establishment of a French garrison in Bangkok. In addition, he had to gather information, mostly military, on the country. The instructions on this point were expressed as follows : “ *[De La Loubère had to] learn the language of the country, to gather information on the conflicts that the King of Siam may have with his neighbours, on the armed forces he may have, on earth or land, on the manner they are accustomed to waging wars, on the number of forts that he may have, on the kind of fortification these forts may have, on the revenue the Sovereign may have, on the extent of his power on his subjects, on their condition as free men or slaves, and, generally, everything concerning the spiritual as well as political government ; His Majesty [Louis XIV] orders that when vessels sail back from this country he [de La Loubère] should send as precise accounts as he could have done*⁷.” De La Loubère's mission was thus manifold and, on its most important part, namely religion and diplomacy, it proved half a failure. Maybe because of this reason, he devoted most of his time to the secondary part of his mission, which was to gather information about the country. He actually spoke little of the military affairs the French authorities were interested in, but

⁷*Ibid*, p. 46 sq.

devoted his book nearly exclusively to the natural and moral history of Siam, as was said at that time, and this is what makes his description interesting to us.

The part of the book in which the chapter on the Siamese calendar is found is essentially a compilation of information the author gathered from various sources, as he stated in the foreword : “ *I have no other hand in this volume, than the collecting the pieces thereof. Some are translations, which are not mine, in some others I only have held the pen, whilst the substance thereof was dictated unto me*⁸. ” De La Loubère does not specify his sources and we are left at guessing who he obtained his information from, but in any case, the author clearly let the reader know that this part of the book is merely second-hand reporting.

On the particular point of the Siamese calendar, de La Loubère speaks of the words used in Siamese to designate the days, the months and the years. The chapter is indeed not so much devoted to the Siamese calendar itself as to the names used by the Siamese. The author proved cautious enough not to try and draw a complete picture of the Siamese calendar at the time of Ayuthaya, since the task was dreadfully complex, and since he had only partly understood its system, as he recognized by the end of the chapter which was quoted. However, his book contains a full translation of a Siamese treatise on astronomy with comments by an undisputed authority of the time, Cassini, which provides a far more complete description of the question, though it is accessible only to specialists⁹. On the other hand,

⁸A *New Historical...* 1969. p. 147. *Du Royaume...* 1987. p. 425.

⁹Cassini, "Règles de l'astronomie siamoise pour calculer les mouvements du

de La Loubère refrained from embarking on the compulsory diatribe on the superstitions of the pagans and their faith in astrology although he did so in other passages¹⁰.

The word lists that de La Loubère provided appear perfectly readable to us, however this does not imply that the author's approach to language is entirely similar to ours. Indeed, the practice of listing words can be the result of totally different approaches and we may be tempted to interpret the practice in our own terms and ignore the background in which it originated. The best way to try and understand the underlying conception of language put in practice by de La Loubère is certainly to have a look at the contemporary school of *Port-Royal*, with which the author had some connections¹¹, not so much as to identify various influences but to consider the observations in their own background.

For this school, language was considered in parallel with logic, or the art of thinking as it was called at that time. According to this theory, there are four stages in the process of thinking : conceiving or representing objects ; judging or asserting something on an object ; reasoning or connecting several judgements ; and ordering or

soleil et de la lune, traduites du siamois et depuis examinées par M. Cassini de l'Académie Royale des Sciences." *Du Royaume...* 1987. p. 507 sq. "Rules of the Siamese Astronomy for Calculating the Motions of the Sun and Moon, translated from the Siamese and since examined and explained by M. Cassini of the Royal Academy of Science." *A New Historical ...* 1969. p. 187 sq.

¹⁰*Du Royaume...* 1987. p. 261. *A New Historical ...* 1969. p. 64.

¹¹Apart from what appears in his description, we know that de La Loubère had read the works of one member of this school in mathematics, Antoine Arnauld (Jacq-Hergoualc'h, *op. cit.* 1987. p. 572). De La Loubère is also reported to have written a treatise on Greek vocabulary *à la manière de Port Royal*. (Lucien Lasnier, *Étude historique sur les relations de la France et du royaume de Siam de 1662 à 1703*. 1883. Farnborough. 1969. p. 90, note 1).

classifying one's conceptions, judgements and reasonings¹². These different stages correspond to processes in language — the act of naming corresponds to that of conceiving and the act of attributing or predicating corresponds to that of judging¹³. These processes correspond to categories as well, as the former process is linked to the category of nouns, among others, and the latter to the category of verbs, among others, taking for granted that “*they [verbs, nouns, etc.] are all derived, out of necessary consequence, from the natural manner in which we express our thoughts*¹⁴.” On the other hand, “*things are present in our mind only with the words we have been accustomed to put on them when we talk to others, it is thus necessary in logic to consider the ideas as associated with words and the words as associated with ideas*¹⁵.” Words thus constitute a set of representations which can be used to express the other type of representations that ideas constitute. However, words are instituted by a variety of means, whether convention, arbitrary decision, fancy, etc., and thus cannot correspond adequately to either reality or thoughts¹⁶. Consequently, logic should consider the thing behind the sign and dissociate the definition of the thing from the definition of the word, and generally speaking disregard the representations provided by the words as well as endeavour both to conceive independently

¹²Antoine Arnauld & Claude Lancelot, *Grammaire générale et raisonnée*. 1660. Editions Allia, Paris. 1997. p. 23-25. This version only mentions the first three stages ; Antoine Arnauld & Pierre Nicole, *La logique ou l'art de penser*. 1662. Gallimard, Paris. 1992. p. 30.

¹³Arnauld & Lancelot, *op. cit.* 1997. p. 24.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Arnauld & Nicole, *op. cit.* 1992. p. 31 *sq.* See also Arnauld & Lancelot, *op. cit.* 1997. p. 40.

¹⁶Arnauld & Nicole, *op. cit.* 1992. p. 76 *sq.*

from words and create a new kind of vocabulary devoid of ambiguities¹⁷.

De La Loubère's observations can definitely not be considered as an application of the precepts of *Port-Royal*, however, we can recognize quite a few points in common, in particular in terms of method, as will be seen. But before examining the question, let us have a look at another practice common at de La Loubère's time, that of making lists of words in different languages. Indeed, compiling words in various languages was a favoured discipline in 17th century Europe as an approach to foreign languages, and one can find dictionaries making an inventory of the different words for the same object in sometimes hundreds of languages, however the discipline had slightly gone out of fashion at the time of de La Loubère¹⁸. This approach automatically leaves an option : one can either list the words first in French and then give their equivalent in Siamese, or any other language, or proceed the other way round. The choice for one or the other solution could be quite heavy with consequences, as in the first case, it is implied that any lexical system could be reduced to another one. In the case of de La Loubère's subject, listing for example the names of the days of the week in Siamese on the basis of the French words would have implied that there could just be one and only model with seven days. As a matter of fact, this is what happened quite often in the 17th century, especially if there was more than one language under examination. On the contrary, de La Loubère did not take for granted that a week had to be reduced to seven days as the French pattern implied, but left all the options open, ready to consider either

¹⁷Arnauld & Nicole, *op. cit.* 1992. p. 78 *sq.*

¹⁸Georges Mounin, *Histoire de la linguistique des origines au XX^e siècle*. Paris, 1967. p. 134.

a week of seven days as is the case of the Siamese calendar or a week of sixty days as is the case of the Chinese calendar, or any other figure. In de La Loubère's choice, one can clearly recognize a principle which was developed by the school of *Port-Royal*, namely that one should distinguish between the definition of a word and the definition of an object, and that only the second should be taken into account for logic.

Even though de La Loubère avoided to cast the Siamese calendar into the mould of the French one by proceeding with vocabulary, one must recognize the evidence that the two systems are quite similar to each other. Not only is the week composed of seven days and the year of twelve months, but the ways of naming the elements hold many things in common. The French name the days of the week after planets, contrary to the Chinese and, partly, the English, and name them after the same planets. Thus, in French, *lundi* (Monday) means the day of the Moon (*Lune*), *mardi* (Tuesday) the day of Mars (*Mars*), *mercredi* (Wednesday) the day of Mercury (*Mercur*), etc., the names corresponding exactly to the same planets in exactly the same order as in Siamese, with an exception, which is not really one, for *dimanche* (Sunday). Additionally, some months in French are named after a number of order, for example *septembre* means literally the seventh month, *octobre* the eighth month, etc. In both cases, the names remain transparent to cultivated people, if not to ordinary speakers.

In this context, a reader familiar with 17th century writings is certainly surprised not to find what he expects in such a case, namely a comment marvelling at the coincidence. As a matter of fact, for many of de La Loubère's contemporaries, these similarities would have been admired as another wonder of God's creation, as time, like all things,

was created by God and, moreover, as the Bible explicitly reports that time was divided in weeks and the week in seven days by God at the beginning of the Genesis¹⁹. Of this, man had some knowledge, whether from the teaching of God, from the observation of nature in its order as a created thing, from the ideas which were spread around the world, or even from his own intuition. We can give credit to de La Loubère for not even mentioning this ready-made interpretation and leaving it to others to express. On the contrary, he looked in another direction, bringing a relative perspective on his observations by different means. First, he mentions the Chinese calendar, bringing evidence that there is no necessity that a week should be composed of seven days, particularly in the area of the world he is talking about. Second, he relates the names of the days of the week used by the Siamese to those used in India, showing that an origin can easily be found and does not have to be looked for in a single and common source of knowledge. In other words, de La Loubère did not only refrain from interpreting the things he reported in a Christian perspective but he also tried to apprehend them in their own context, certainly feeling that it was the only method for not distorting the accuracy of his observation.

Nevertheless, de La Loubère's account proves in one instance to be tainted by the approach he probably tried to avoid. Indeed, he listed the days in Siamese, saying that “ *Van Athit*, (is) the day of the Sun, or Sunday ” and afterwards that “ The names of the planets are therefore, *Athit*, *Tchan*, *Angkaan*, etc. ” In this case, he took for granted that the Siamese identify seven planets as the Westerners do and that they were the same as in the Western week. He actually proved right and simply reported accurate information, but by

¹⁹Genesis. I, 1.

proceeding the way he did, he excluded any possibility that there could be another perception of the planets in a different civilization. De La Loubère may have proceeded differently in front of the evidence of another reality, but in this case he did not.

There is something else to examine concerning de La Loubère's choice of approaching the Siamese calendar through the agency of words — the systematic dimension. Indeed, as obvious as it may sound, a list of words in the case we are interested in, could be accurate only if it was complete as the author could not list the names of the months, for example, by just mentioning a few of them. Systematicity is thus an automatic, nearly necessary, implication of the very choice of listing words but it also becomes part of the method for the analysis. First of all, the author acknowledges by the end of the passage quoted that he could not obtain the complete list of the names of the decade and even gave up the idea of mentioning the few names he could obtain in a list. One of these names is actually mentioned in the context of a couple of examples but the absence of a complete list made it impossible for the author to draw a table out of the available names and thus to treat them like the others. Moreover, de La Loubère says that he had not understood the system of the decade even though he describes it rather accurately, as will be seen later. The description of the use of the decade is thus disregarded as a secondary factor which cannot be accurately treated due to the incomplete list of names and which leaves guessing as the only option. Another example of the consideration for systematicity is found in the description of the names of the days of the week. When considering them, the author draws a comparison with the names of the days of the week in Sanskrit,

as found in another book on the customs of the Brahmins in India, to say that the words are related to each other. In this case, though the comparison cannot be drawn systematically, the author brings in data from other parts of the same book so as to fulfill the condition of completion. The last example to mention is the remark that the names of the animals corresponding to the years are mostly Pali. This observation is inaccurate, as will be seen, but we notice that the author takes systematicity into account everywhere, even when it is only to remark that the names have various origins.

Another thing to note, is the consideration of order that the author introduces in the lists he made. The very fact of presenting a list in the space of a table automatically implies that there should be some order in this presentation, and consequently the table itself imposes one of the stages of reasoning described by the thinkers of *Port-Royal*. This consideration of order is twofold in the case we are interested in : the order of succession and the starting point in the succession. Concerning the order of succession itself, we note that in the three cases the author makes a list, he does not take into consideration the words themselves but the successive order they have in the cycle in which they appear. Indeed, words have no order in themselves, this absence of order being generally compensated by arbitrary means such as the alphabetical order, and de La Loubère resorts to the order they have in their own cycle, in as much as *Van Athit* "Sunday" is followed by *Van Tchan* "Monday" etc. in a week, *Deüan ái* "first month" by *Deüan Tgii* "second month" etc. in a year, *Pii ma mia* "year of the little mare" by *Pii ma mê* "year of the great mare", etc. in a twelve year cycle. By doing this, the author inscribes the words in an order and consequently into a level totally different from the level

he claims to be examining. As a matter of fact, he thus considers not the words themselves but the objects they refer to and considers them as ordered within a system of representation. It was of course far more interesting for the science of the time to provide indications concerning the Siamese calendar cycles rather than a simple list of words in alphabetical order, but here de La Loubère made a jump from one level to another and then found himself divided between considering the words or the objects they represent.

This is perceptible when we examine the starting point of the order of succession, as we have a different situation for each list. If the order of succession is strictly accurate in the three lists, their starting points raise a few problems. For the days of the week, de La Loubère starts with Sunday, as it was the first day of the week and was often noted "1" in the Siamese dates²⁰. The second list is more problematic as it starts with the so-called "first month". This may sound logical enough, but as a matter of fact, the so-called first month was not at de La Loubère's time the month when the astronomical year started, but it happened to be situated in the middle of the year. De La Loubère was aware of this fact, as seen in another chapter entitled "What the Siamese know of the mathematics", in which he speaks of the astrological methods of calculation : "*Their first month is always the Moon of November or December, (...) even though the first month of the year is, according to the new manner, either the fifth or sixth month of the older manner*"²¹. " Thus, the author did not take the first element

²⁰J.C.Eade, *The Calendrical Systems of Mainland South-East Asia*. Leiden, New-York, Köln. 1995. p. 42.

²¹A *New Historical*.... 1969. p. 65. *Du royaume*.... 1987. p. 263. De La Loubère does not seem to have been aware that the tradition of starting the civil year with the first month was still continued. Cassini, already mentioned, brings evidence that the

of the cycle, as was the case with the days of the week, but the order as implied by the meaning of the words, even if this order does not correspond to reality, saying that the names are arranged "in their order". As a result, de La Loubère's table is as strange as if one had said that, in the French calendar, *septembre*, *octobre*, *novembre* and *décembre* correspond respectively to the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth months of the year, because that is what they literally mean and as this meaning remains more or less transparent in French language. Concerning the names of the year, de La Loubère started with the *Pii ma mía*, when he should have started with *Pii Choiuat* not only to be in keeping with the tradition, but also to be able to apprehend the mode of functioning of this cycle. It seems here, though this is not exactly the case as will be seen, that de La Loubère had arbitrarily picked up a year and listed the following ones, without taking into account a regular order. On the whole, this lack of consistency is quite confusing and an uninformed reader can hardly tell when de La Loubère merely provides a report of the words or of the objects they represent.

The translations are similarly hesitant between giving a literal rendering of the word in French and describing the cycles. If the translation of *Van Tchan* to *lundi* (Monday), etc. raises no problem, it is purely because there is a coincidence between the planets and the days in Siamese as well as in French. In that case, it is possible for the author to give an idea both of the word and of the concept. On the contrary, translating *Deüan áü* by "first month" is merely a translation

astronomical year started in the fifth or sixth month whereas what he calls the civil year started with the first month. (Cassini, "Règles ..." *Du Royaume...* 1987. p. 507. "Rules ..." *A New Historical...* 1969. p. 187 sq.) On this point, see as well ประเสริฐ ณ นคร, "ปฏิทินไทย" *งานจารึกและประวัติศาสตร์* นครปฐม 2534 หน้า 134. Prasert Na Nagara, "The Thai Calendar" *Articles on Inscriptions and History*. Nakhon Pathom, 1991. p. 134.

of the name and does not indicate the concept but, on the contrary, the translation is misleading. As far as the names of the years are concerned, translating *Pii ma mía* "year of the little mare", apart from being inaccurate²², has no real value in abstraction of the cycle in which it is found and means very little to Europeans.

It is interesting to note that de La Loubère, in this case, made a type of mistake which was denounced by the school of *Port-Royal*, namely confusing the ideas with the words, as different images could be conceived under a single name²³.

The last thing to remark concerning de La Loubère's approach is that he draws comparisons with other similar texts and calendar systems. We are now quite familiar with this practice, which even became a fully fledged method in the 19th century, but in the 17th century, it was not so common. Actually, making comparisons was possible only because the encyclopedic movement which was mentioned at the beginning of this article was becoming widespread, and because there were similar reports from other countries. De La Loubère's comparisons are all the more remarkable as they only use data from the same geographical area. The names of the days in Siamese immediately call for a comparison with French and other European calendars, however de La Loubère resorted to other data, as if he tried to compare only what is comparable.

Again, de La Loubère's comparisons are variously made at two levels : the level of the words themselves and the level of the objects the words represent. When establishing the comparison with the

²²It should be translated "year of the horse".

²³Arnauld & Nicole, *op. cit.* 1992. p. 76 sq.

Sanskrit words, he does not only compare the forms of the words to identify a link between the two sets, but also the meanings of the names, and beyond that, the systems in which they are used. Concerning the comparison with the Chinese data, de La Loubère does not mention the forms but simply evokes a sixty day cycle and another of sixty years. Strangely enough, the author mentions this fact in the passage concerning the days, where it is hardly relevant, and does not mention it in the passage concerning the years where it could be of some help to understand the Siamese decade, though this gave him a hint to the right solution. Last, he states that the names of the twelve year cycle are mostly Pali, without giving any justification to his assertion which seems here quite arbitrary.

Concerning the comparisons of the Siamese with Sanskrit and Pali, de La Loubère does not try to determine the relationship that may exist between the words and the languages. He simply notes the resemblances or similarities between the Sanskrit words for the planets and those used by the Siamese, and he states that some of the names of the years are Pali words. To put it differently, when making comparisons between lists of words, the only type of connection the author establishes is a connection of identity. It is all the more remarkable when he deals with the names of the days in Sanskrit, as he tries to identify the Pali names under them because these words *are* Pali, and their being used by the Siamese does not make them the least Siamese at all. There is no attempt in these lines of the text to discover an origin of the words or a filiation, but simply to determine the link of identity between the two lists of words. In that respect, one should keep in mind that in 17th century Europe, the very idea of genealogies of languages and words was ignored, as it had no interest for science.

As a matter of fact, French at that time was in no way related to Latin, or to Italian, Spanish, etc., as they were simply foreign languages among others²⁴, and if any connection was to be established for French, it was generally with Hebrew²⁵. As a consequence, de La Loubère simply stated a link of identity between the words, saying that the Siamese words are Pali with no further comment, and never contemplated the possibility of examining the connection in terms of origin or whatever.

The part devoted to the names of the years in the description is presented in the same manner as the other parts, but it deserves special attention, in particular because it contains quite a few remarks which are quite confusing. It is worth noticing that as long as the author described a calendar similar to his own with a week of seven days and a year of twelve months, he could provide a fairly accurate description, but as soon as he reached a system which was foreign to his own, he was at a loss to make a description²⁶. Indeed, the text looks quite odd and we could be tempted to consider that the twelve year cycle at the time of Ayuthaya was totally different from the one we know now, if we did not have other sources of information. To confirm that the twelve animal cycle in the 17th century was the same as we know it now, let us quote the list found under the pen of another French writer, Nicolas Gervaise, who was in Siam at the same time as de La

²⁴Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*. Paris. 1966. p. 104.

²⁵Mounin, *op. cit.* 1967. p. 135-136.

²⁶The author does not mention the different eras used in Siam in this passage but in another chapter devoted to the knowledge of the Siamese in mathematics (*Du Royaume...* 1987. p. 261. *A New Historical...* 1969. p. 64).

Loubère : “ *rat, cow, tiger, pot, snake, scorpion, horse, goat, monkey, cock, dog, and pig*²⁷. ” This list calls for some comments too – it is basically accurate, if we overlook one or two details in the translations, apart from two exceptions, namely the “pot” and the “scorpion”. Actually, these two elements do not belong to the twelve year cycle but to the twelve solar mansions of the zodiac, the scorpion corresponding to *Cancer* and the pot to *Aquarius*. We find other examples of confusion between the twelve year cycle and the twelve mansions cycle, and Gervaise may have simply copied one of these lists which confused the two²⁸.

If we consider again de La Loubère's account, we note that the forms of the words and the order of succession are correct but the starting point is inaccurate and the translations are in general fanciful, to say the least. In front of so many anomalies, we may be tempted to disregard the list altogether, however, if we have a close look at it, we can draw quite a few interesting lessons from it.

The order of presentation is not so arbitrary as it seems. It indeed looks as if de La Loubère had arbitrarily picked up *Pii ma mia* and listed the others successively, however there may be some reasons for this choice. The first year of the Buddhist Era was a *Pii ma mia*²⁹

²⁷“ rat, vache, tigre, marmite, serpent, scorpion, cheval, chèvre, singe, coq, chien et cochon. ” Nicolas Gervaise, *Histoire naturelle et politique du royaume de Siam*. Paris. 1688. p. 155. The list, to our standards, should be : “ rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, great snake, small snake, horse, goat, monkey, cock, dog, and pig. ”

²⁸For example a Mon manuscript dating back to the turn of the century recently published lists a part of the twelve animals under the title of the twelve months of the year and a part of the twelve mansions (จน เครือวิชาการจารย์ *วิถีชีวิตชาวมอญ*. เมืองโบราณ, กรุงเทพฯ ๒๕๓๗ หน้า ๒๓. Jon Kruawichathayajan, *The Mon Way of Life*. Bangkok. 1994. p. 23).

²⁹Years counted as current (see below).

and it is possible that the cycle was conceived as starting at the beginning of one of the eras used by the Siamese³⁰. This way of reckoning may have been due to the Siamese or Western astrologers endeavouring, for example, to assign an origin to the twelve animal cycle. However, it is more likely that this order is the result of a practice, still in use nowadays, consisting in dividing by 12 a given Buddhist year so as to determine the animal of that year. If the remainder of the division is 1, it is a year *ma mīa*, if the remainder is 2, it is a year *ma mē*, etc. Consequently, we can suppose that the twelve animals were commonly listed in that order, starting with the year *ma mīa*. This is actually what is found in the modern *Royal Academy Thai Encyclopedia*³¹, where the first list of the twelve animals to appear under the form of a table appears in this order for the reason given above.

There is yet another possibility, if we consider that de La Loubère established the list according to the decade. As de La Loubère says in a confused manner, the Siamese used the twelve year cycle in parallel with a ten year cycle (the decade) with, by definition, a discrepancy between the two cycles. As a matter of fact, the two dates mentioned by de La Loubère later on in the text (Buddhist Era 2229 and 2231) belong to a decade in which the year *ma mīa* could be considered as starting the decade which corresponded to the years A.D. 1678-1687. In other words, the list is not presented in the order in which it appears conventionally and in abstraction of a given time,

³⁰We wish to thank Prof. Prasert Na Nagara for bringing this observation under our attention.

³¹สารานุกรมไทย ฉบับราชบัณฑิตยสถาน “นักษัตร” กรุงเทพฯ หน้า ๘๔๘๑ กรุงเทพฯ ๒๕๒๓-๒๔

Royal Academy Thai Encyclopedia. "Naksat". Bangkok. 1980-81. p. 9481.

but probably as it appeared in the decade contemporary to the period when de La Loubère was in Siam, as the author himself says indirectly in the last paragraph of the text quoted ("the twelfth of the years, which was then running"). In that case, he did not take the order of the cycle itself, but the order in which the cycle presented itself at the time he was collecting the data, and as a result, his observations are as strange as if a Siamese envoy in Europe had for some reason listed the months starting with August and ending with July.

Another thing to note is that the list of the twelve animals begins with a *Pii ma mia* maybe because of the order in the running decade, but a *Pii ma mia* can never be first in a decade, as it can only be second, fourth, sixth, etc. Actually, de La Loubère may have started the twelve animal cycle with the decade starting with the year 0 (zero), that is, in that case, Small Era 1040³². Thus, the decade may have been identified by de La Loubère, or his informants, as starting with Small Era 1040 (A.D. 1678), a *Pii ma mia*, and ending with 1049 (A.D. 1687), that is with a decade starting with the year -0 and ending with the year -9. On the contrary, in the Siamese tradition, the decade started with the year -1 and ended with the year -0. The year -0 is the last one in the decade, as seen from its Sanskrit name, *สัมฤทธิ์ศก/sāmrīthīsòk/*, which means "complete, achieved"³³. Thus, whereas a Siamese counted from 1 to 0, a Westerner counted from 0 to 9.

The confusion reaches a climax when we turn to the translations of the names. Some of them are accurate (*Vok* "monkey", *Counne*

³²By definition, year 1 in the decade corresponds to a year -1 in the Small Era, etc. For example, the year Small Era 1041 was first in the decade, the year 1042 second in the decade, etc.

³³สารานุกรมไทย ฉบับราชบัณฑิตยสถาน "ปฏิทิน" เล่ม ๑๗ หน้า ๑๐๗๘๘ ต่อไป
Royal Academy Thai Encyclopedia. Op. cit. "Calendar". Volume 17, p. 10789 sq.

"pig") ; others are slightly different (*ma seng* "great serpent" instead of "small serpent" and *ma mia* "little mare" instead of "horse") ; some others are wrongly assigned ("rabbit" is associated with *Choiat* whereas it should be with *Thô*, "hens" is associated with *Kan*, whereas it could be associated with *Rakaa*) and the rest is rather puzzling (*Rakaa* "crow", *Tchiô* "sheep", *Tchlou* "lizard", *Kan* "hens", *Thô* "goat" and *ma Rong* "sea-gull"). The author also says that some of these words are Pali, giving no justification for his assertion and no hint for the origin of the others. With reference to these names, we have to keep in mind that they are not those used to designate the animals in common Siamese, but only the animals in the calendar. These words were borrowed by the Khmers from a Vietnamese dialect and later by the Siamese from the Khmers at the time of Sukhothai³⁴. As such, the words were not transparent for the Siamese themselves but Gervaise's testimony shows anyway that an accurate list could be obtained. If we compare de La Loubère's list with that of the twelve solar mansions in Siamese, no conclusion can be drawn and we have to exclude the possibility that the author confused in some cases the animals with the mansions, as Gervaise did in a couple of cases. We thus may be tempted to conclude that de La Loubère muddled up his notes on a large scale. However, among the translations, some cases are quite interesting, because the absence of correspondence with the animal as appearing in the calendar can be explained by false etymologies of the

³⁴George Cœdès, "L'origine du cycle des douze animaux au Cambodge." *T'oung Pao*. XXXI. 1935. p. 328.

ยอร์ช เซเดส, "ความเป็นมาของรอบนักษัตรในกัมพูชา" แปลโดย ประหยัด นิชลาพันธ์ และ Laurent Hennequin ยอร์ช เซเดส กับตะวันออกศึกษา รวมบทความแปล กรุงเทพฯ ๒๕๔๒. หน้า ๒๑๔ ต่อไป.

words. Thus, มะเมีย /má mia³⁵/ normally translated as "horse" was understood as "little mare", that is as ม้าเมีย /má: mia/ "horse female" ; มะแม /má mɛ:/ normally translated as "goat" was understood as "great mare", that is as ม้าแม่ /má: mɛ:/ "horse mother", explaining why the other one became *little* mare ; ระกา/ráka:/ normally translated as "cock" was understood as กา/ka:/ "crow" ; ขาล/k^hǎn/ (spelling k^ha:l) normally associated with the tiger was here associated with the hens, maybe because of Sanskrit कलज्ज /kālaḥ/ "chicken"³⁶. It thus seems that the translations were "rectified" so as to meet attributed etymologies and not simply because the author had met some problems reading his notes. This is all the more likely, as de La Loubère states that some of the words, and interestingly only some of them, are Pali, though there is no ground to support this assertion.

The point is now to consider who could be responsible for such fanciful etymologies. Interpreting words in the light of this type of etymology was a favoured discipline in Western science, dating back to Socrates, but it was rather out of fashion at the time of de La Loubère³⁷. On the contrary, such considerations were totally ignored by the speculations of *Port-Royal* on language and were not even alluded to. Moreover, when de La Loubère failed to notice that the

³⁵The words are transcribed according to their modern standard pronunciation. It seems anyway that the pronunciation at the time of Ayuthaya was fairly similar to present standard Thai, especially for the consonants. See Jimmy G. Harris, "The Consonant Sounds of 17th Century Siamese." *Mon-Khmer Studies*. 21. p. 1-17. The author mostly relies on data from de La Loubère's description of the Siamese alphabet.

³⁶วิสันต์ ภูแก้ว, ที่มาของคำบาลีสันสกฤตในภาษาไทย และ คำไวพจน์ในภาษาบาลีสันสกฤต. กรุงเทพฯ ๒๕๒๗. หน้า ๑๗๖. Wisan Kotkew, *The origin of Pali-Sanskrit words in Siamese and Pali-Sanskrit synonyms*. Bangkok. 1984. p. 176.

³⁷Foucault, *op. cit.* 1966. p. 49 sq. & Claude Hagège, *L'homme de paroles*. Paris. 1985. p. 144 sq.

Siamese week is the same as the one created by God according to the Bible, he definitely ignored the old theory for which the facts of nature as well as the words constitute a large book of signatures for men to read in³⁸. Nevertheless, we cannot exclude that the missionaries living in Siam in the 17th century were not adept to such a backward discipline and de La Loubère may thus have unknowingly repeated somebody else's interpretation in a perspective which was contrary to his own.

On the other hand, Siamese testimonies reveal that there was a similar tendency in Siam to interpret words according to an attributed etymology which was either fanciful or a mere play on words³⁹. The exercise was mostly done with Sanskrit-Pali geographical names, but we find, though in various times and places, comparable interpretations in the very domain of the words used in the Siamese calendar. It is thus reported that in Lanna, "the year of the pig" was replaced by "the year of the elephant" and as Cœdès noted : "*[This] is probably due to the scholars who recognized the Pali word kañjara "elephant" behind the word kuñ, which is the Siamese spelling for kur, the latter form being the Cambodian word for the pig in the cycle and is pronounced kun by the Siamese*⁴⁰." As another example, the Siamese word which designates the twelve year cycle, นักษัตร *naksatra*, meaning literally

³⁸Foucault, *op. cit.* 1966. p. 40 sq.

³⁹See *Cāmadevīvaṃsa* in George Cœdès, "Documents sur l'histoire politique et religieuse du Laos occidental." *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*. T. XXV. 1925. p. 141 sq. See as well Michel Antelme, *La réappropriation en khmer des mots empruntés par la langue siamoise aux vieux khmer*. Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani. 1996. p. 50 sq.

⁴⁰"Au Laos occidental le cochon est remplacé par l'éléphant. [... Cela] est sans doute le fait des lettrés : ils ont cru reconnaître pâli *kañjara* "éléphant" sous le mot *kuñ*, orthographe siamoise de *kur*, qui est le nom cyclique cambodgien du cochon et qui est prononcé *kun* par les Siamois." Cœdès, *op. cit.* 1935. p. 316, note 2.

"constellation" in Sanskrit, is occasionally found spelt under the form นักสัตว์ *naksatw*⁴¹, that is as if it contained the segment สัตว์ *satw* which means "animal" and which in Siamese is identical in pronunciation to the last syllable of the word นักษัตรา *naksatra*, even though this interpretation is not acceptable in terms of etymology. The cases may be different from those which are reported by de La Loubère but they confirm that there was a form of etymological science among the Siamese and that it did not only apply to the field of geographical names. It may also again be a case where the description is the result of the superposition of Siamese science in the light of Western science, and the reverse, as operated both by Siamese and Westerners, and it is difficult to determine who did what and what the facts were if we have no other source of information.

Anyway, the analysis above has shown that de La Loubère's report is not so fanciful as it may first look and that it is neither simply the application of a Western pattern of interpretation imposed on a field where it is totally irrelevant, whether this was due to de La Loubère himself or to his informants. On the contrary, de La Loubère's report may reveal a rather unexpected application among the Siamese of a science of etymology. In this case, we can only wonder what the list de La Loubère recorded was intended for. Was it mere speculation ? Was it intended as a replacement for the list currently in actual use ? Did it appear under this form in some court usage ? It is impossible for

⁴¹See for example จารึกในพระวิหารพระโลกนาถ หลักที่ ๑๓๑. *ประชุมจารึก ภาคที่ ๖* ตอนที่ ๑. ๒๕๑๗ หน้า ๑.

Inscriptions on Viharn Phralokanat. Inscriptions 131. *Collection of Inscriptions*. Volume 6, book 1. Bangkok. 1974. p. 1.

us to choose between these various hypotheses, all the more so as we are not sure that de La Loubère's report is totally reliable on this point.

There is another thing to note concerning the few examples of dates which are quoted. The years 2229 and 2231 given as examples in the last paragraph do not correspond to A.D. 1685 and A.D. 1687 as stated, but to 1686 and 1688 respectively. These years belong to the Buddhist Era and there was at the time of Ayuthaya, as sometime before and after, two ways of reckoning years in this era : by counting the number of years *elapsed* or by counting the number of years *current*, the former count being by definition one year behind the latter⁴². In the former case, one has to deduct 544 to obtain the equivalent in the Christian calendar and in the latter case, 543. For his calculation, de La Loubère deducted 544 as if the years were counted in number elapsed, whereas they should have been counted in number current. Indeed, the year 2229 can be a *Pii Tchlou* (year of the ox) and the year 2231 can be a *Pii Thô* (year of the rabbit) only if they are counted as current years. De La Loubère seems to have been unaware of the existence of this double system of computation and, as a foreigner, paid attention simply to the year and not to the cycle and, more important, no attention to the combination between the year and the cycle. The author notices that it “ is all one to say the *Æra* 2229, and to say the year *Tchlou Sapsoc*”, and he was quite right in noticing that the two indications are redundant, but if he had correctly understood the principle, he failed to apply it and notice that the two elements were not in correspondence as he thought. This led him to produce another

⁴²J.C. Eade, *Southeast Asian Ephemeris. Solar and Planetary Positions, A.D. 638-2000*. New York. 1989. p. 12.

mistake and the mistake seems to have been generalized among the foreigners interpreting Siamese dates, as Cassini, in his comments of the treatise of astrology published in de La Loubère, proved at a loss to interpret some dates for this very reason⁴³. Furthermore, dates in Siamese were usually not formulated so simply as they are in the transcription given, at least in the official way which is probably the only one which has reached us. In particular, there were formulas indicating if the Buddhist year counted the number of years elapsed or not. It is possible that de La Loubère or his informants dropped part of the sentence and some of the numerous redundancies usually contained in a date, so as to simplify the examples and make them more accessible for Western readers, thus creating a cause for misunderstanding.

Concerning the decade, de La Loubère admits that he did not understand its principle. In fact, he had received wrong information — if the year 2229 (Small Era 1047) was indeed seventh in the decade (*sapsoc*), the year 2231 (Small Era 1049) could not be seventh as well, but could only be ninth⁴⁴. With two years within a same decade bearing a same name of order in the decade, which is impossible, de La Loubère wrongly concluded that the decade was a name attributed to a full cycle of twelve years to differentiate succeeding twelve year cycles and probably believed that *sapsok* was the name given to one of the twelve year cycles with four others bearing different names ($5 \times 12 = 60$). He was certainly all the more confused if he knew, as may

⁴³Cassini, "Règles ..." *Du Royaume...* 1987. p. 507. "Rules ..." *A New Historical ...* 1969. p. 203.

⁴⁴It is not equivalent to seventh either in the traditional Tai decade but equivalent to fourth (เมิ่ง mæng).

actually have been the case, that *sapsok* meant something like "seventh". Moreover, *sapsoc* is quite an approximate transcription, as it should be something like *saptasok*. In conclusion, it appears that the raw data de La Loubère had in his hands were not accurate and the inaccuracy was such that he could not understand how the system worked. Actually, he had a good guess, when he states that the decade contributes to the sixty year cycle, but he did not have sufficient information to explain the system. He also gives no list of the names for the years as they are called in the decade. Interestingly, nobody could provide him with a ready-made explanation of the system, showing that his informants were not really familiar with the Siamese calendar or were rather selective in their observations.

In spite of all the approximations contained in the text, it is also possible to look at de La Loubère's account to note some details that he unintentionally gives concerning the situation of the Siamese calendar in the 17th century.

First of all, he mentions the Chinese cycle with sixty names used for days and years, and mentions a sixty year cycle among the Siamese, although he is at pains to explain how it worked. He thus makes no mention of a sixty day cycle among the Siamese, though he was aware of the existence of such a system in China. As a matter of fact, we have evidence that the Siamese had made use of such a cycle for the days and that it was still currently in use at the time de La Loubère was writing, in Lanna, Lan Chang among other places⁴⁵. If the system had disappeared in the official usage in Ayuthaya, it is

⁴⁵Roger Billard, "Les cycles chronographiques chinois dans les inscriptions thaïes." *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*. 51. 1963. p. 403 ; ประเสริฐ ณ นคร,

possible that it survived in popular usage. De La Loubère's information on the contrary seems to imply that it was no longer in use at the time and place he was writing about. Also, a cycle of sixty is mentioned for the years but is not associated with the Chinese cycle as the question is treated separately and as some of the names are, wrongly, qualified as Pali. De La Loubère thus did not identify the Siamese cycle with the Chinese cycle. Relating to this, we also know that the Siamese had made use of another sixty year cycle in the Chinese style which had disappeared in the official usage of Ayuthaya and survived in the same other places, but as the author makes no mention of it, we may conclude that it had too disappeared in any kind of usage in the Kingdom of Ayuthaya.

De La Loubère speaks of an Indian influence and of the Chinese in several places, but makes no mention of the Khmers when speaking of the twelve year cycle, although, as we know now, the words of the animals were imported through the agency of the Khmers. Was it because there was no description in French of the Kingdom of Cambodia comparable to those of India and China at that time ? Was it because the Siamese themselves were trying to underestimate the influence that the Khmers had had on them as the latter constituted then a small and weak country under Siamese and Vietnamese influence ? The answer may be a conjunction of both.

We also note that de La Loubère makes no mention of another system by which months were given Sanskrit-Pali names, *Jitra*,

“วันเดือนปีในเอกสารโบราณ” ประเสริฐ ณ นคร และคณะ, *จารึกล้านนา ภาค ๑ เล่ม ๑ จารึกจังหวัด เชียงราย น่าน พะเยา แพร่*. 2536 หน้า 297. Prasert Na Nagara, “Dates in ancient documents.” in Prasert Na Nagara et alii, *Inscriptions of Lanna. First part, First Volume : Inscriptions from Chiang Rai, Nan, Phayao and Phrae*. 1993. p. 297.

Wisakha, etc., though it presents a higher interest, linguistically speaking. Actually, this other system was not so common as the one described by the author, it was redundant, and the names are rather complicated. It thus appears that the designation of months by Sanskrit-Pali names was not so much an alternative as a complication in the official usage.

Another point to note is that we can see that between the two cycles in use at Ayuthaya for the years, the twelve year one seems to have been more important than the decade, as de La Loubère could obtain a description of the former but not of the latter. If we go beyond the inaccuracies in the author's analysis on that point, we note that the twelve year cycle was better known, probably because it was far more common. If we have a look at the rare documents of the time still available, the animal associated with the year regularly appears, whereas the number of order in the decade appears only occasionally, as the decade was probably not very commonly used at the time the author wrote his report. Because of the Thai annals of Ayuthaya, which were mostly written during the Thonburi and Ratanakosin periods, we consider the form *year + animal + decade* as typical of the period of Ayuthaya, whereas it was probably not such at the time of de La Loubère, the decade being apparently at that time a comparative rarity. Also, the year in the annals is nearly systematically given in the Small Era but the two examples given by de La Loubère are in the Buddhist Era. Although the sample is too small to draw conclusions, this is indicative that the dates in the Ayuthaya period were not so exclusively given in the Small Era as the annals may lead us to think.

Last thing, the Siamese annals report that in the year 1 000 of the Small Era (1638 A.D.), the reigning king, Prasatthong, made a

ceremony supposedly to modify the calendar, the consequence of which would have been a change in the order of succession of the animals⁴⁶. The modification was not adopted, if it was ever enforced, as de La Loubère's testimony brings evidence that some 50 years after this supposed reform the traditional order prevailed and the cycle followed its course.

It should be stressed, when reaching the conclusion, that in the chapter on the calendar, de La Loubère is not at his best, compared to quite a few other chapters which are far more reliable. We can identify the flaws in this chapter because we have sources of information other than de La Loubère's account, and consequently are able to assess the accuracy of his observations. It is thus possible here to note the inaccuracies and approximations of the text as well as conclude that the description is mostly accurate. Indeed, de La Loubère faithfully reports that the Siamese had a week of seven days named after the same seven planets as in France, that the names of the day had the form and meaning as reported, that a year was composed of twelve months bearing the names reported, that the Siamese had a sixty year cycle composed, in part, of a twelve year cycle in which a year bore the name of an animal, among other things worth noticing. Moreover, de La Loubère provides hints at the Siamese calendar in usage at the time of Ayuthaya which are quite valuable. His description is consequently significant not only for the curiosity of a 17th French reader and Western

⁴⁶พระราชพงศาวดารกรุงเก่า ฉบับสมเด็จพระปรมานุชิตชิโนรส. กรุงเทพฯ 2504. เล่ม 1. หน้า 367 ต่อไป.

The Annals of Ayuthaya by Kromphra Paramanuchitchinorot. Bangkok. 1961. Vol. 1, p. 367 sq. The year Small Era 1 000 was to be changed from a year of the tiger to a year of the pig.

science, but also for a modern historian. In general, the data available from other sources, whether they be Siamese or French testimonies or the present situation with the traditions which were maintained up to now, as is the case of the twelve animal cycle, confirm de La Loubère's account more often than they contradict it.

However in quite a few cases, de La Loubère is our only source of information and the text examined clearly shows that the observations the author reports must be read very cautiously. The analysis of the text indeed identified that some of the data de La Loubère had received could be erroneous, as was the case with the decade, but it also showed that the author was honest enough to recognize that he did not understand what he was reporting about. Furthermore, the text enables the reader to identify where Siamese culture is reduced to a foreign perspective — the list of the months is ordered according to the meaning of the words with no consideration to the actual cycle within a year ; the list of the twelve animals is ordered not according to convention but depending on other considerations ; the decade may have been counted from 0 to 9 whereas it should have been counted from 1 to 0 ; the translations of the names of the twelve animals probably take into account a scholarly version and not the version in actual usage, etc. More generally, the simple fact of considering a set of cycles through the agency of words is certainly foreign to Siamese habits. This approach was actually uncommon, and possibly totally ignored, among the Siamese, and the use of such an approach by de La Loubère automatically inscribed the data that are reported in a perspective different from the Siamese one. This is probably the reason why the list of the twelve animals reported, which was possibly simply the work of speculation of some Siamese scholars became,

under de La Loubère's pen, the one in actual usage. However, when the observations are not confirmed by other sources, the reader does not really know which precautions should be taken and is left at guessing where the text might be at fault.

Additionally, the very approach of listing words entails many consequences, such as the starting point of the list, its order and systematicity, and the raw data are consequently inscribed in several dimensions which may eventually distort the accuracy of the report as was seen in a few instances. Moreover, the practice of listing words was an object of reflection in Western science, as shown in de La Loubère's choice of translating the words under examination from Siamese into French, and not the other way round as was often the case at that time, with again many consequences concerning the description of the object under consideration. Finally, words were considered in the 17th century, if we follow the school of *Port Royal*, as a set of representations, the same as ideas could be, but were neither a reflection of the ideas nor of reality. In that respect, it is difficult to determine how far de La Loubère adhered to this theory, on the contrary he produced a couple of confusing remarks that the school of logic was teaching to avoid, but his approach to language was definitely different from those which were born after him. Indeed, when linking the Siamese names of the day to those in Sanskrit, he established no relationship in terms of genealogy as the philological school of the 19th century was to do. He never tried either to establish a relationship between the sets of words and the mode of thinking of a people, as some supporters of the same school were to do. Furthermore, he never considered the words he spoke about as part of the intrinsic

system of a language, as structural linguistics currently does, but simply as part of the system of a cycle or of the Siamese calendar.

It thus seems that, in reading de La Loubère, we learn more about Western science and the Western way of approaching a foreign culture in the 17th century than about Siamese culture itself. Actually, it demonstrates that we can have access to the description of the Siamese culture by a foreigner only if we can understand the perspective and background of his testimony. For a European observer or reader of the 17th century, a description was by definition a representation, and we are now compelled to examine what could be the mode of representation of a 17th century Frenchman in order to be able to understand his descriptions. In the contrary case, our reading of de La Loubère may be the cause for more misunderstandings than the inevitable misconceptions the author may have himself expressed. If de La Loubère's observations can definitely be read from a Siamese perspective, it is essential that they should first be read in their own perspective, otherwise they may sometimes seem more foreign to us than 17th century Siam was to the French envoys.